

Message Text

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ACTION EA-09

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SUBJECT: GOVERNMENT TO TAKE NEWSPAPER TO COURT

1. THE GOVERNMENT OF INDONESIA (GOI) HAS ANNOUNCED IT WILL "TAKE TO COURT" THE MOSLEM DAILY PELITA ON A CHARGE OF "LYING AND GIVING A BAD IMPRESSIO OF THE GOVERNMENT" IN ITS COVERAGE OF THE 1977 ELECTION CAMPAIGN, DURING WHICH THE PAPER SUPPORTED THE OPPOSITION MOSLEM-BASED DEVELOPMENT UNITY PARTY (PPP). CHIEF OF THE COMMAND FOR THE RESTORATION OF SECURITY AND ORDER (KOPKAMTIB) ADMIRAL SUDOMO, WHO PUBLICLY PROMISED SEVERAL WEEKS AGO THAT NO PAPER WOULD BE SHUT DOWN BECAUSE OF ITS ELECTION COVERAGE, ANNOUNCED THE GOI DECISION, BUT WOULD NOT SAY UNDER WHAT LAW PELITA WOULD BE CHARGED, WHEN THE CHARGE WOULD BE FILED, 94 2#-5 PENALTY WOULD BE SOUGHT.

2. SUDOMO CLAIMED THAT PELITA WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR "CREATING DISORDER" BY PUBLISHING "LIES INSTEAD OF NEWS." CITING AS AN EXAMPLE A MAY 21 PELITA STORY WHICH STATED THAT 150 HOMES HAD BEEN BURNED IN A LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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VILLAGE IN EAST JAVA BECAUSE OF ELECTION RETRIBUTIONS, SUDOMO SAID, IN FACT, ONLY A FEW HOMES WERE BURNED AND THE INCIDENT HAD NO CONNECTION WITH THE ELECTION. REMINDING THE PUBLIC THAT PELITA HAD ALREADY BEEN OFFICIALLY WARNED FOR ITS "EXCESSES," SEVERAL TIMES IN THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN, SUDOMO ASKED, "HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO SPEAK BEFORE I AM FORCED TO

TAKE ACTION?"

3. ALL OF JAKARTA'S PAPERS HAVE HEADLINED THE PELITA STORY, BUT EDITORIAL AND PUBLIC REACTION HAS SO FAR BEEN MUTED. PELITA ITSELF EDITORIALY DENIED SUDOMO'S CHARGES, WHILE NOTING THAT "THE PRESENTATION OF THE NEWS DOES NOT YET COMPLETELY FULFILL THE HOPES OF EITHER THE PEOPLE OR THE GOVERNMENT." THE PAPER CALLED ON ALL SIDES - THE PRESS, THE PUBLIC AND THE GOVERNMENT - TO WORK TOGETHER TO IMPROVE, RATHER THAN REPRESS, THE MEDIA. KOMPAS, PROBABLY JAKARTA'S MOST RESPECTED DAILY, WHILE MAKING CLEAR ITS BASIC SYMPATHY FOR PETLIT'S PLIGHT, DID APPLAUD THE GOI PLAN TO SEEK ACTION THROUGH THE COURTS RATHER THAN BY SIMPLY CLOSING THE PAPER. JAKARTA GOVERNOR ALI SADIKIN TOOK MUCH THE SAME LINE, WHILE NOTING THAT PELITA MIGHT JUSFITIABLY ASK, "WHY US AND NOT SEVERAL OTHER NEWSPAPERERS?"

4. IN AN INTERESTING SIDELIGHT, SUDOMO MADE HIS ANNOUNCEMENT FOLLOWING A MEETING OF THE "COMMUNICATIONS FORUM," WHERE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE THREE CONTENDING PARTIES DISCUSS OUTSTANDING ISSUES FROM THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN. AS A RESULT, A SENIOR PPP OFFICIAL, CHALID MAWARDI, HAPPENED TO BE SITTING BESIDE SUDOMO WHEN HE SPOKE TO THE PRESS. WHEN ASKED BY A JORNALIST IF THE ACTION AGAINST PELITA WAS IN FACT AIMED AT THE PPP, SUDOMO DIRECTED THE QUESTION TO MAWARDI, WHO COULD ONLY LAMELY REPLY THAT THERE WAS NO "STRUCTURAL CONNECTION" BETWEEN THE PAPER AND THE PARTY.

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5. COMMENT. SOME GOI ACTION AGAINST PELITA HAS BEEN WIDELY RUMORED, SO SUDOMO'S ANNOUNCEMENT CAME A NO SURPRISE. ASSUMING THE PAPER IS IN FACT LEGALLY CHARGED - AND WE WOULD NOT ENTIRELY PRECLUDE THE POSSIBILITY THAT THIS, LIKE OTHER SUDOMO "DECISIONS," WOULD NEVER BE IMPLEMENTED - THE IMPACT ON LOCAL MEDIA OPERATIONS AND ON INFORMED PUBLIC OPINION WILL DEPEND ON THE OPENNESS AND EQUITY OF TH COURT PROCEEDINGS. PELITA IN FACT DID ON OCCASION EXAGGERATE AND DISTORY THE NEWS AND DOME OBSERVERS MAY FEEL SOME PUNISHMENT IS WARRANTED. OVERKILL, THOUGH, WOULD BRING DOWN ON THE GOI A NEW SWARM OF DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL CRITICISM. NEWSOM

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